

REGION 4 — SUSQUEHANNA

MARY DOBINSKY

Winter was hardly worthy of the name until February. On the heels of a dry and very mild fall, December and January just followed the same pattern. At Oneonta the mean temperature for December was 32°F, almost 7° above normal. Rainfall for the month was slightly below normal and only 2.40 inches of snow fell, most of that on 8 Dec. The New Year started with rain, sleet, a little snow and a few cold days, but January will be best remembered for lack of snow, lots of sun and four successive days of record high (58-62°F) temperatures from 13 to 16 Jan. With time running out, winter finally put its act together. It started at Cooperstown with the season's first subzero temperatures on 28 Jan, the latest date in the past 82 winters, according to Harold Hollis, National Weather Service observer. Then on 4 Feb the Region was hit with its only major snowstorm. Accumulations ranged from 10.6 inches at Binghamton to 13.7 inches at Cooperstown. Quickly following the snow were about 10 days of near zero temperatures and strong west winds. Warmer days the latter part of the month didn't quite offset the earlier cold. As a result February temperatures were recorded as a little colder than normal. Also total snow for the month was slightly above normal, but snow for the winter season was only half the usual amount.

Except for a few days in February, rivers and creeks were mostly open and, since precipitation fell most often as rain, stream water levels remained high all season. Birders out on January waterfowl counts complained of swift currents and lack of shoreline. However, 13 species of duck for the season, including eight species of diving duck, was an excellent record. American Coot was a season surprise. In a normal year, ten would have been excellent, but unprecedented numbers were found at Otsego Lake.

Lack of snow cover created ideal hunting conditions for predators so, not surprisingly, it was one of the best winters ever for raptors. Highlights included a record total for Northern Harrier on Christmas Bird Counts; two reports of Red-shouldered Hawk, and several reports of both Bald and Golden Eagle. Andy Mason noted that his DOAS CBC team watched a Golden Eagle "dive into a flock of Wild Turkey, but he didn't get one." Andy added that on reporting to Bob Miller, DOAS compiler, Bob was reminded of witnessing similar behavior last May when a Golden Eagle struck a turkey twice, both times unsuccessfully.

Atop winter events was a rare *Boreal Owl*, probably a first Regional report. Four other owl species were reported but only a single Eastern Screech-Owl while Northern Saw-whet Owl was missed. Shrike is our other possible predator species, but N. Shrike, the expected one, was not reported. Instead it was a *Loggerhead Shrike*.

In an addendum to his 1994 Franklin Mt. Hawk Watch report, Chris Vredenburg, compiler, theorized that "raptors migrate through our area on a broader front than currently studied." The most recent indication to him was the passage of 15 Golden Eagles at two sites 8 Dec. Of these, 12 were seen at the hawk watch site and all but one before 1:15 p.m. No Bald Eagle was seen. Later in the day and 25 miles northwest, at his West Burlington home, Tom Salo sighted three Golden Eagles plus one Bald Eagle between 2:00 and 3:00 p.m., all flying southwest. "Given the geography involved," Chris concluded, "it is unlikely that the flight route of the birds Tom saw could have passed by Franklin Mt."

For top news among game birds, we choose the flock of Ruffed Grouse that patronized an old hedgerow in back of Elva Hawken's home, T Preston CHEN. From the first of December until 17 Jan, as many as 20 grouse stopped to feed morning and evening as they traveled to and from their roosting sites. Fruits of nannyberry, arrowwood and hawthorn were the hedgerow's menu specials.

The mild winter made anything seem possible. Species such as Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Ruby-crowned Kinglet and Rose-breasted Grosbeak, seldom here in December, were on Christmas Bird Counts. Good numbers of Northern Flicker, Eastern Bluebird and American Robin, and a single Rufous-sided Towhee overwintered. In contrast the half-hardy species we expect at our feeders were scarce. Carolina Wren numbers have been down since last winter's killing cold weather. Perhaps Northern Cardinal and Northern Mockingbird missed the abundance of Multiflora Rose bushes they favor for winter food and cover. Many plants didn't recover from last winter's damage. Missed most were the winter finches who evidently were content with the weather and available food in their northern territories. No crossbills were reported, and only a few individuals of other finch species were listed. A sad note on finches were single reports of house finches with eye disease from CHEN, CORT and DELA. From McGraw, Bill Toner reported caging a finch he found with "crusted and closed eyes," treating the eyes with medication and releasing it a week later.

Rarities of the season were *Boreal Owl* and *Loggerhead Shrike*. Missed species included Pied-billed Grebe, Bufflehead, Northern Shrike and Common Grackle.

Observers: Cutler & Jeannette Baldwin, Les Bemont, Bruce Bozdos, Mary Ann Cuff, John Davis, Charley Dever, Mary Dobinsky, Sadie Dorber, Dolores Elliott, Roy and Margaret Gorton, Bob Grosek, Jim Hoteling, Sara Kinch, Gail Kirch, David Lincoln, Harriet Marsi, Andy Mason, G & E Mead, Bob Miller, Sue & Chip Metheney, R. Pantle, Marie Petuh, Dave Rossi (DRo), David Russell, Tom Salo, Bob & Jean Saunders, Joseph Sedlacek, Eric Sullivan, Tom and Norene Tasber, Chris Vredenburg, D. Weber, Anne Whitaker, Don Windsor, Irene Wright, Jane Young, Dick Zeccada.

Abbreviations: BCBC - Broome Christmas Bird Count, 18 Dec; CanRes - Cannonsville Reservoir; ChCBC - Chenango Christmas Bird Count, 17 Dec; CoCBC - Cortland Christmas Bird Count 17 Dec; DOASCBC - Delaware-Otsego Audubon Society Christmas Bird Count, 17 Dec; FHNC - Finch Hollow Nature Center; FMHW - Franklin Mt. Hawk Watch site; JC - Johnson City; TBC- Tioga Bird Club; TCBC - Tioga Christmas Bird Count, 26 Dec.

Winter reports: **Com. Loon:** Susquehanna R at Binghamton 25 Dec (ES); OTSE 15 Jan (AM). **Double-crested Cormorant:** OTSE 15 Jan (AM), late. **Great Blue Heron:** 17 on five CBCs; five Jan reports; three Feb, good count. **Snow Geese:** seven BCBC, not seen every winter. **Canada Goose:** 2387 on five CBCs; 1,000+ Otsego L through Jan; occasional flocks all winter. **Wood Duck:** two BCBC. **Green-winged Teal:** three CanRes 16 Jan, second winter in last six. **Am. Black Duck:** 121 on five CBCs; 78 CanRes 16 Jan; off Route 12 BROO through Feb (T&NT), max 30. **Mallard:** 1425 on five CBCs, good numbers through period, especially BROO. **N. Pintail:** Susquehanna R at Westover 28 Jan (MAC). **Canvasback:** nine TCBC (C&JB), often missed. **Redhead:** Chenango R Binghamton 19 Feb (PB); River Road Endwell 26 Feb (JH), not reported every winter. **Ring-necked Duck:** 28 CoCBC. **Greater Scaup:** BROO 8 Dec (HM). **Com. Goldeneye:** 15 CoCBC; three Jan reports, max eight DELA 29 Jan; two Feb reports, max eight BROO 19 Feb, scarce. **Hooded Merganser:** six CoCBC; two OTSE 15 Jan; singles TIOG Dec, BROO Feb, scarce. **Com. Merganser:** max 100 Goodyear L through 6 Dec; good numbers widespread through period. **Red-breasted Merganser:** only Tioughnioga R canoe trip 2 Jan (BG).

Osprey: last T Preston CHEN 8 Dec (EH), fifth winter since 1984, very rare before then. **Bald Eagle:** four of six Jan reports were from DELA Res area, max 14 TBC Eagle count 29 Jan; one BROO 12 Jan (T&NT); Owego 21 Jan (SK); Schenectady 13 Feb (DR), five s Hancock 17 Feb (BG), very high. **N. Harrier:** 20 on five CBCs. **Sharp-shinned Hawk:** 12 on five CBCs; nine Feb reports, high. **Cooper's Hawk:** 10 on five CBCs; at many

widespread feeders through period. **N. Goshawk:** DOASCBC; Chenango R Norwich 14, 15 Dec (DW); T Preston 17, 25 Jan and 12 Feb (EH); TIOG 25 Jan (G&EM); Downsville area 3 Feb (BG), high count. **Red-shouldered Hawk:** FMHW 10 Dec; arr JC 26 Feb (JH), first winter reports in 16 years. **Red-tailed Hawk:** 144 on five CBCs; 37 DELA 29 Jan (TBC); 11 BROO 10 Feb (HM), high counts through. **Rough-legged Hawk:** 30 on four CBCs; 10 reports both Jan, Feb, max three, good count. **Golden Eagle:** *intro.* **Am. Kestrel:** 15 on four CBCs; 10 Jan, Feb, good counts especially BROO, TIOG. **Ring-necked Pheasant:** seven four CBCs; "female with no tail feathers" JC feeder 4, 5 Jan (JH); four Feb reports, max three. **Ruffed Grouse:** *intro.* **Wild Turkey:** 535 on five CBCs; late winter max 200+ in four flocks CHEN (EH) and in three flocks OTSE (MD) 17 Feb. **Am. Coot:** record max 116 Otsego L 15 Jan; later reports indicated good numbers remained around the docks at Waterfront Park through the period. **Ring-billed Gull:** 438 on four CBCs, mostly CORT. **Herring Gull:** 945 CoCBC, high count. **Great Black-backed Gull:** max 13 CoCBC; BROO 27, 29 Jan (HM, BB, GK); 25 Tioughnioga R at Cortland 7 Feb, 30 on 13 Feb (BT), good total.

Mourning Dove: 898 on five CBCs, good count. **E. Screech-Owl:** only TIOG Dec (JS). **Great Horned Owl:** five BCBC; two T Preston late Dec and 15, 25 Feb; singles TIOG Dec, Jan. **Barred Owl:** singles T Preston Dec, Feb; BROO Dec. **Snowy Owl:** Route 41 Homer 1 Feb (CD), sometimes missed. **Boreal Owl:** first heard outside T Preston CHEN home about 5:45 AM 28 Dec (EH) when the unfamiliar sound, "high-pitched hollow hoos all on one note," tracked for about 25 minutes as the bird apparently moved slowly through a large stand of evergreens; "By that time, I had the call well fixed in my mind and had it pinned down to that of Long-eared or Boreal Owl. It was then easy to listen to my tapes and identify the mystery bird as Boreal; heard it again 31 Dec but was never able to see it". **Belted Kingfisher:** 10 on four CBCs; two-three reports/month. **Red-bellied Woodpecker:** nine on three CBCs mostly TIOG; three TIOG sites, one CORT Jan. **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker:** DOASCBC. **N. Flicker:** 10 on three CBCs. **Pileated Woodpecker:** 15 on four CBCs.

Horned Lark: max 102 ChCBC; 20 Smyrna 4 Dec; late winter max 50 Riley Road CORT 22-24 Feb, excellent count. **Am. Crow:** record CBC total 4,070. **Com. Raven:** n of Cooperstown 29 Jan "seen and heard singing" (JD); one TIOG Jan (RP); third successive winter, expanding its southern range? **Black-capped Chickadee:** 2214 on five CBCs. **Tufted Titmouse:** 144 on five CBCs, third highest count. **Red-breasted Nuthatch:** 46 on five CBCs; fewer at winter feeders. **Brown Creeper:** 24

on five CBCs, average count. **Carolina Wren**: continued scarce. **Golden-crowned Kinglet**: 59 on five CBCs, best since 1984; several TIOG Jan, one CORT Feb. **Ruby-crowned Kinglet**: three CoCBC. **E. Bluebird**: max 30 on TCBC; max four on two of eight Feb reports, best ever. **Am. Robin**: only 15 on three CBCs; big increase by mid Feb, max 100+. **N. Mockingbird**: two-three reports/ month, all BROO except one TIOG, scarce. **Cedar Waxwing**: 486 on four CBCs second highest count last 15 years; crab apples an attraction to large flocks Feb. **Loggerhead Shrike**: one CHEN CBC (S&CM! *fide* DW).

N. Cardinal: 198 on five CBCs, lowest since 1988. **Rose-breasted Grosbeak**: well described first fall male Norwich 22 Dec (DW), only third winter report since 1979. **Rufous-sided Towhee**: Burlington Flats feeder after 9 Dec (DL), often missed. **Am. Tree Sparrow**: 393 on five CBCs, best count since 1989; continued high through period max 70 BROO 10 Feb (MP). **Song Sparrow**: 28 on three CBCs, high. **White-throated Sparrow**: 13 on two CBCs; occasional at widespread feeders, max six JC 5 Feb after snowstorm, scant. **Snow Bunting**: 86 on three CBCs, max 60 CORT; BROO County Landfill 14 Dec-4 Jan, max 20 (JH, BG), only reports. **Red-winged Blackbird**: several Sherburne 13 Dec; arr JC 20 Feb. **E. Meadowlark**: Binghamton CBC. **Brown-headed Cowbird**: 166 on three CBCs, high; arr T Preston 20 Feb. **Pine Grosbeak**: two females near Oxford 22 Dec (DW); max 14 Binghamton "feeding on crab apples" 21 Jan (DRo); single BROO 9 Jan (DZ), scarce. **Purple Finch**: 41 on three CBCs; T Preston yard through period max 27 on 21 Feb (EH). **Com. Redpoll**: 13 ChCBC; five CHEN feeder 23 Dec, scarce. **Pine Siskin**: max 20+ "feeding in Hemlock trees, high elevation Bradley Creek Rd., BROO" 19 Jan (JH); three DOASCBC; singles Vestal 9 Jan, Oneonta 14 Feb, scarce. **Am. Goldfinch**: 353 on five CBCs; scarce at feeders until Jan; several flocks 100+ Feb. **Evening Grosbeak**: 14 on two CBCs; one CHEN 26 Dec, scarce.

CORRIGENDUM: *Kingbird* 44:312. Delete the entry for **Horned Grebe**; no such record was received.

7 Spencer Drive, Oneonta, New York 13820